Folder 22: Wheeler, Ralph K. (Haines) 1938

Haines, Alaska
January 14, 1938.

Dear Mr. Glasse:-

The death of Harry Willard on Dec. 21st was a great personal blow to me as well as to the work at Klukwan & to the Thlinget work generally. Probably his wife was partly to blame - thru being overly ambitious. However, she and our people generally deeply appreciate the swift action and generosity of yourself and Dr. J. M. Somerndike. The local Natives dug the grave and also furnished the plot and transportation gratis; the Indian Bureau paid the hospital bill, the Klukwan orchestra furnished the funeral music. Due to the very stormy weather Mrs. Willard was unable to go to Klukwan and pack her household goods and return in time to take advantage of the free trip on the "Fornance" which Major Amis offered to give her & her relatives. She hopes to return to Juneau on the next trip of the "Baranof."

The "Chilkat Breeze", the local high school newspaper, complimented our Christmas Sunday service in which the choir sang three beautiful anthems directed by 1st Sgt. Hart of Company E.

Our New Year's Eve Watch Night service was a truly spiritual occasion with a fine attendance in spite of the terrific gale which blew a good many of the composition shingles off the Manse roof. The House staff praised the quality of the worship; the Ihlingets provided fine refreshments and Sgt. Hart led over an hour of hymn singing with Ruth as the pianist. For the second successive year there was not a single arrest in the community.

On the 4th we regretfully bade farewell to Capt. & Mrs. Nichols & Ginger. Mrs. Nichols was the sponsor of our Bible study class and came from the Post to church even in the worst weather and was a real Presbyterian giver. Ginger was president of the Young People's society.

On the 5th I fell on the glare ice while returning from a pastoral call at the hospital and wrenched my back severely. It still bothers me considerably but we are optimistic and trust in God.

Yours sincerely

Ralph Kline Wheeler

Haines, Alaska
February 1, 1938.

Dr. J. M. Somerndike
Board of National Missions
156 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y.

Dear Dr. Somerndike:—

Your kind letter came yesterday but I was too busy getting a pair of gypsies, who had been preying on the local Natives, deported to answer immediately. You may be certain that if I ever wish to leave this field I will first of all notify you and the chairman of the Alaska Presbytery committee.

Two days after I arrived here Col. W. C. Miller, then Commanding Officer at Chilkoot Barracks, asked me to accept a commission as a Reserve Chaplain. After consulting with my Session I did so. Before he left he urged me to become a Chaplain in the Regular Army. This I refused to do because of my promise to you. Last summer Col. R. W. Dusenbury before departing again advised me to become a Regular Chaplain. This I refused for Ruth's sake (she prefers Haines).

2) Major Lewis Amis, now the C.O., has begged me to spend more time at the Post than formerly but in justice to the needs here, at the cannery, in Klukwan and at Skaguay I feel unable. At a recent Sunday evening open forum which I sponsored on "War versus Pacifism") I stated that I would volunteer as Chaplain in case the President declared war.

In this mail I am writing the Chief of Chaplains requesting that a Catholic chaplain be sent to the Post. Then the Protestant personnel could attend our services if they so desired. Some of the Skaguay trustees asked me to transfer there. But I told them I liked the tolerant attitude toward Natives here better and that it has taken us 3 years to gain their confidence & insight into their psychology.

Yours respectfully
Ralph Kline Wheeler

March 3rd, 1938

Rev. Ralph K. Wheeler
Haines, Alaska

Dear Mr. Wheeler:

Your good letter of February 1st bringing the assurance that you are continuing in your work as missionary at Haines pleases me very much. I am glad that you rejected the overtures that were made to you to enter the chaplain service in the regular army. Of course I realize that if war were declared you would feel the urge to volunteer as a chaplain, but so long as peace prevails I feel that you can use the talents with which God has endowed you to better advantage in preaching the gospel of peace and love and good will to the people.

I am a little sorry that you suggested that a Catholic chaplain be sent to the Chilkoot Barracks. It may be a wise move but I am not very favorable to any plans which look toward increasing the strength of the Catholic Church in Alaska.

You will be glad to know that we have assigned a new man to Skagway who we hope will be able to be on the field by April 1st.

Faithfully yours,

JMS:FDS

For Dr Somerville

Haines, Alaska
April 12, 1938.

Dear Mr. Pederson:—

Because this suggestion is made with the hope of increasing the scope and effectiveness of Presbyterian work in Alaska, please do not think me presumptuous in offering it. Since several denominations are now operating mission boats in southeastern waters the work of the "Princeton" is not as distinctive as it once was. This idea is not wholly original with me, but it seems that a Presbyterian airplane piloted by a consecrated "Sky Pilot" missionary could be of great service to the Yukon & Alaska presbyteries.

For instance, part of the year it could be used to contact outlying mission points such as Gambell and Wainright for the purpose of observing the Lord's Supper & conducting evangelistic services. An adequate plane could help with transportation emergencies such as came up at our recent meeting at Angoon. I believe that the group which gave the money for the "Princeton" or some similar individual or group would be glad to make such a practical gift at the 150th General Assembly. At

least Dr. Somerndike could consult with his fellow secretaries and with the Commissioners from Alaska and Yukon Presbyteries about the feasibility of the project.

Since returning from Angoon I circulated a petition among our adult Natives which no one refused to sign requesting the new Town Council to forbid the sale of liquor to Natives. Last night the Council asked the city clerk to write the Attorney General of Alaska for an opinion as to its constitutionality.

The members of the Klukwan congregation were greatly disappointed that no layworker was assigned to their field for next year. They know that for several months during midwinter I may be unable to drive my car to their services. Their young people are showing fresh interest in church activities and have ordered several more musical instruments for the Christian Endeavor orchestra.

Yours respectfully
Ralph Kline Wheeler

April 26th, 1938

Rev. Ralph K. Wheeler
Haines, Alaska

Dear Mr. Wheeler:

I was very much pleased with your suggestion sent to Mr. Pederson and forwarded to me regarding the possibility of the Board acquiring an airplane. I can readily see how an airplane would be useful in Alaska. It would cost a good deal of money to buy one - far more money than we have available now. It would require some money to employ a pilot to operate the airplane for I do not know any minister who in his theological training has learned how to operate an airplane or whose theological training would be considered sufficient credentials to secure a pilot's license. Do you? It is a fine idea, but I am afraid it is way beyond us now.

Faithfully yours,

JMS:PDS

Dr. Somerndike:

Haines, Alaska
May 16, 1938.

Dear Mr. Pederson:—

I failed to get this report written on time ford the first time in four years and I apologize to you and to Dr. Somerndike. It was largely due to the fact that for the past week I had practically given up ordinary church work in the effort to secure the reappointment of Richard Knotts as a local high school teacher. Knotts is a deacon in our church, has been sponsor of the C.E. society for several years & a member of the choir for over four years. But in the very close municipal election which took place while I was attending Presbytery two new school trustees were elected. It was due to the apathy of the best element in town — only 3 House staff members voted, for instance. So I will think twice before missing another election -- even in order to attend Presbytery.

By the way, will it be possible to repair the brick chimney of our Manse this Summer before next Fall's storms?-the project was approved at

Angoon by the National Missions committee.

We had splendid attendance at all our Easter services and a large offering for benevolences was received. On April 24 th we had a special service for the Sourdoughs & Old Timers which we intend to make an annual observance on the last Sunday in April. Some who attended stated that it was the first Sabbath they had spent in church since coming to Alaska! This is the best season for such a service because thereafter many leave to go mining or prospecting or fishing.

On Mother's Day we used the Order of Worship furnished by the Board of Pensions and mimeographed by some of the C E members, the offering was quite gratifying. I have been using my spare time helping the Government School principal make a census of the Natives in the village so that it will be easier for them to get Old Age Assistance and other relief when they need it urgently.

Yours respectfully
Ralph Kline Wheeler

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